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## SOLDIERS, SUPPLIES FLY TO 1ST ARMORED DIVISION SITES IN IRAQ ON 'IRON EXPRESS'

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*A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the 4th Brigade of V Corps' 1st Armored Division prepares to pick up Soldiers and packages as part of the Iron Eagle Express that transports people and supplies from Baghdad International Airport to the division's Forward Operating Bases.*

### BAGHDAD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, Iraq --

Medical supplies, Meals-Ready-to-Eat and mail literally fly into the hands of Soldiers here, thanks to a program that uses helicopters to rapidly re-supply forward-based troops.

Dubbed the "Iron Eagle Express" or just "IEX," the program was set up by the Division Support Command of V Corps' Task Force 1st Armored Division. DISCOM officials arranged for a pair of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the division's 4th Brigade to make daily re-supply runs. The choppers deliver a variety of much-needed and much-welcomed items to the outlying camps and forward operating bases south of Baghdad.

The program had a pretty quick takeoff, and has carried hundreds of passengers and many tons of supplies, said DISCOM's Maj. Martha Granger.

"We have hauled passengers that have included doctors, interpreters and chaplains, and cargo of various classes (of supply) such as mail, uniforms, body armor plates and medical supplies," the major explained.

IEX took wing April 27 and the the seats and cargo space have been in high demand ever since.

"Our fear at first was that [this program] wouldn't catch on, but now we are overwhelmed with customers," Granger said. "Most people think of using helicopters for emergency re-supply, so for a heavy division, this is a new way of thinking about routine re-supply."

Flights are full most nights and a few potential passengers have been turned away or asked to fly a night later, said Sgt. Maj. Edward Massey, DISCOM support, plans and operations sergeant major and IEX flight organizer.

This program is in high demand because "it uses fewer resources to move troops and supplies from point A to point B," Massey said.

Granger, Massey and two other DISCOM Soldiers coordinate the re-supply effort. They receive movement requests; post flight manifests on the division's tactical web site and make hourly adjustments to the flight plan.

At each stop, the flights' contents change. To help orchestrate the complicated maneuver, Massey or another DISCOM staff member flies the round trip each night. As a regular on the flight, Massey coordinates the pickup and drop-off of passengers and organizes the bags and boxes that are constantly rotating on and off the aircraft throughout the trip.

Massey said coordinating the loads is challenging and requires patience and persistence. For example, he told of delivering some X-ray images to Forward Operating Base Lima.

"When I got there, I couldn't just drop them off. I had to hook up with a responsible party," Massey said.

Sometimes waiting for those connections throws off the schedule, but the delivery takes place regardless of any problems, he said.

When the division's mission here changed, the size of its area of operations grew to roughly 9,100 square kilometers, straining the unit's supply convoy capacity, Granger said. When bases were close by, the DISCOM shuttled supplies and people with ground convoys, he said. But when the area operations grew, ground supply would take more than eight hours each day.

Still, the use of helicopters instead of trucks to move supplies has brought a new set of challenges with it.

"The heavier use brings higher maintenance cycles for the birds, and sometimes weather hampers the trips," Granger said.

Also, arrival and departure times are frequently unpredictable, she said. But no one seems to mind, he added.

"... The flexibility and patience of our pilots and passengers has made all the difference."

